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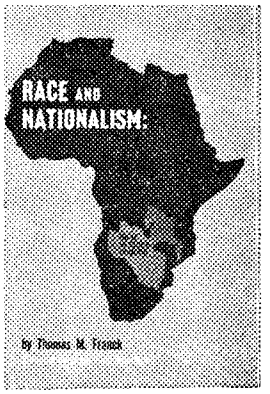

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THE
Commonweal
A Weekly Review of Public Affairs, Literature, and the Arts
THIRTY-SIXTH YEAR OF PUBLICATION

week by week

HE BIG ISSUE

IF THIS campaign was ever restrained and unexciting—which we don't believe—it certainly isn't that way any more. The points of difference between the candidates have become bruisingly clear, and they are being pursued with a vemence which approaches violence. The trigger or this campaign explosion was, of course, the sue of Quemoy and Matsu, the Chinese offshore lands held by the forces of Chiang Kai-shek.

Vice President Nixon evidently believes that in ie Quemoy-Matsu question he has found "the big sue" he has been waiting for. And if the public sponse thus far to the charges and countercharges the candidates is any indication, Mr. Nixon may ell be right.

Nevertheless, the problem of the offshore islands in many ways an extraordinarily muddled key sue. The original excitement was based on the ct that, in the second T.V. "debate," Senator ennedy answered a reporter's question by saying at he thought Quemoy and Matsu were strategically indefensible, and that the United States ould not permit itself to be drawn into war over e fate of these islands in themselves. Mr. Nixon ized upon this answer and declared his own posion that the islands were in "the area of freedom," id that the U.S. should not under any circumances give up even an inch of this "area of freeom" to the Communists. But this was only the ginning. Senator Kennedy pointed out that Mr. ixon's stand on these islands was in fundamental position not only to his but also to the official sition of President Eisenhower, Secretary Dulles id the State Department, whose pronouncements the subject—although frequently ambiguous—id consistently avoided any commitment to de'nd these islands except insofar as such defense ight be necessitated in a defense of Formosa.

Thereupon a number of strange developments ensued. Mr. Nixon altered his position and declared the importance of defending Quemoy and Matsu if an attack on them were part of an attack on Formosa. (This stand was identical with Mr. Kennedy's, of course.) Further, however, Mr. Nixon continued to denounce Mr. Kennedy's position (which he had himself now adopted) as "woolly thinking," which was likely to bring the nation to "surrender and war—or both." Nor was that all. The Vice President maintained that he had not really changed his position at all. President Eisenhower got into the act by reaffirming the Administration's position (which Senator Kennedy had quoted from and agreed with in explaining his views), declaring that there was complete agreement between himself and Mr. Nixon, and saying that he sided with Mr. Nixon in the dispute.

THE "KEY ISSUE" is thus, on the surface, a wildly confused and incoherent argument. And there is no doubt that the convictions of Mr. Kennedy and Mr. Nixon on the limited and isolated question of the intrinsic importance of Quemoy and Matsu have now boiled down to pretty much the same thing, despite the Vice President's disclaimers. But beneath this almost comically illogical quarrel, we think, there are some crucial points of difference between the candidates which go far beyond the issue of the two small islands themselves.

Quemoy and Matsu make up only a small part of the over-all questions of strategy and policy in the Far East and, aside from particular agreement with Administration spokesmen on one or another facet of the problem, Senator Kennedy has served notice that he believes we must have a complete reappraisal of our situation in the Far East, with particular reference to the future of Formosa and

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our future relations with the Chinese Communists, as well as the future of the islands of Quemoy and Matsu. As with domestic concerns, Senator Kennedy speaks for vigorous action to improve conditions which, he believes, are bad in themselves and ominous for the future.

Vice President Nixon on the other hand, aside from agreement or disagreement with the present Administration or Mr. Kennedy on one or another specific question, makes clear his belief that our foreign policy problem is to maintain the conditions which he insists are good in themselves and reassuring for the future. Beneath the surface hullabaloo over Quemoy and Matsu, then, there is great significance to the confused and confusing dispute which is now raging. Much less important than what is said about Quemoy and Matsu is what is implied about China, Formosa and the Far East in general.

For years scores of military and political experts have urged a thorough-going reconsideration of the untenable and unrealistic U.S. policies in the Far East. In relation to Quemoy and Matsu, as The Commonweal said in the crisis of 1958, the U.S. is faced with an impossible situation if it assumes a needless commitment to defend indefensible islands with no hope of achieving anything more than the continuation, for a doubtful period of time only, of an obviously doomed status quo.

We think, therefore, that the misnamed "Quemoy-Matsu issue," with all its confusions and contradictions, is as important as Mr. Nixon does, although obviously for different reasons. And, despite the distortions and emotionalism which are dominating the headlines, we think that the differences between the candidates are becoming, every day, more clear, more specific and more crucial.

AFTER THE VISIT

ASIDE FROM the opportunity the visit afforded for making worldwide propaganda, there are two lines of interpretation for Khrushchev's spectacular performances before the U.N. One would stress the Soviet leader's present difficulties, the second the traditional Communist approach to democratic institutions. Khrushchev is apparently still smarting from the U-2 incident, which revealed to Communist China and the world that the Soviet Union, for all its proficiency, is not invulnerable to air attack. This could account for much of his belligerence. The severe setback incurred by Mr. Khrushchev's pet agricultural program in remote Siberia and Kazakhstan likewise underlined his need of some propaganda success. There is to be little if any Russian grain this year for export to satellites dependent on such sustenance.

More than one commentator has been struck by the parallel between the Khrushchev tactics at the U.N. and the Lenin instructions to Party members about their role in wrecking parliamentary assemblies. According to this view, Mr. K. gave full play to his undeniably persuasive powers, not in hopes of winning over a majority but rather to weaken or neutralize the U.N., to prepare the way for its eventual destruction. Anyone who has dealt with the Communist apparatus directly even on a small scale in, say, a union local may recognize there the lineaments of "rule or ruin."

How successful was Khrushchev in impairing United Nations capacity for settling disputes? His highly "unparliamentary behavior" reflected his awareness of Russia's missile-weapon strength; on occasion it involved outright brandishing of rockets. Yet many delegates refused to be intimidated Neutralist abstentions, and votes favoring a debate on China's admission plus wide support for the Soviet proposal of a general discussion of colonialism were the most tangible parliamentary result of his twenty-five-day mission.

From the very nature of things it is the smaller nations that make up the overwhelming majority of the U.N. membership. Those nations which have comprised part of the organization from its earliest days have great faith in its potentialities They firmly support the policies of Secretary Hammarskjold and reject Soviet-proposed structural changes that would impair the U.N.'s capacity to act with authority. Likewise many of the new members from Africa and elsewhere have long set great store by the United Nations. Both groups tend to view it as the only alternative to submission to predominantly two-power world. Even so, Mr. Khrushchev's very forcefulness, backed up as it is by conventional and thermonuclear armed might has already led to talk about "advisers" to the Secretary-General and fears for the future of Mr. Hammarskjold.

Other comment at the United Nations takes a more auspicious turn. Mr. Khrushchev's actions have made clear the extent to which the organization is now threatened. Typical was his partial declaration that the U.S.S.R. would boycott any disarmament talks unless they were conducted on Soviet terms. All this has led many nations to recognize the need for common preparedness against further Russian maneuvering. Renewed dete

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mination to build up the U.N. is one of the good results of the stormy Khrushchev visit. Much depends on whether the neutralist nations fully appreciate the dimensions of what is at stake.

CATHOLIC INCONGRUITY?

ONE THING the "religious issue" in the campaign has done: it has got people thinking, speaking and writing about Church-State subjects who clearly have never before given such matters much thought. This is all to the good, but syndicated columnist Roscoe Drummond recently illustrated that pitfalls as well as rewards wait for the unwary in this field.

Writing about the position of the two candidates, the N.Y. *Herald Tribune* columnist said that Senator Kennedy dissented from what Mr. Drummond called Catholic "dogma" on union of Church and State. Corrected on this point by a reader, Mr. Drummond retracted the term "dogma" and then promptly proceeded into even deeper water.

"Many Catholics who affirm their support of separation of church and state still want Congress to appropriate funds to aid parochial schools," Mr. Drummond wrote. Granting that the Bishops of the United States had in 1948 reaffirmed the traditional American Catholic support of the Constitution, including the First Amendment, Mr. Drummond complained that the Bishops nonetheless "advocated repeal of the Supreme Court decision which appeared to put a stop to assistance to sectarian institutions." ("Neither a state nor the Federal government can pass laws which aid one religion, aid all religions, or prefer one religion over another.") "Many, I think," Mr. Drummond concluded, "including some Catholics, will see an incongruity between avowing support for the theory of separation of church and state and the continued desire to use public funds for sectarian purposes."

Like most Church-State issues, the question of federal aid is a complicated one, demanding a certain minimal precision of language. Simply to speak of appropriating "funds to aid parochial schools," for example, as Mr. Drummond did, means very little. Aid them how?

Most Catholics probably favor measures based on the traditional distinction between aid to the child and aid to the school, involving in general those items classified under health and welfare, a category which would include such items as federally-aided lunch programs and medical-dental inspections and, probably, school bus transportation. On these points, it should be noted, Catholics would have the support of many Protestants and Jews, as well as that of the Supreme Court. Beyond such health and welfare issues, however, the question gets more involved, not to say confused, and it is doubtful that anyone can say with any certainty "what Catholics want."

We know of no Catholic leader who suggests that federal funds be granted for the construction of parochial schools; we do know of Bishops who have said explicitly that they do not want and would reject such aid. We know Catholics who think parents of children in parochial schools should get some kind of tax relief to avoid the burden of "double taxation"; we know other Catholic parents who might think this a very bad idea, and Senator Kennedy has made his position quite clear. The most important thing here, however, is that those Catholics who do ask for some kind of aid or tax relief in connection with parochial school education are not "avowing" support for the Constitution and at the same time trying to subvert it. They believe the First Amendment bars favoritism as between one religion and another; it does not mean, in their view, that the federal government must exclude religious schools from consideration in aiding American education, provided that no one religion is preferred over another—a point, perhaps, that is less persuasive to non-Catholics than it might otherwise be simply because Catholics happen to operate the majority of the nation's parochial schools. Nonetheless, the theory is supported by various Constitutional experts, not all of whom are Catholics by any means, and the Supreme Court itself has in other opinions tended to weaken the impact of the particular decision quoted by Mr. Drummond.

The school question is clearly one on which men of good will can and do disagree. In the course of one week in the current political campaign, for example, Republican Vice-Presidential candidate Cabot Lodge and Presidential candidate Richard Nixon managed to find themselves on opposite sides of this issue—a fact which may be embarrassing to them as running mates but which illustrates the possibilities for a variety of views in this matter. We doubt that Mr. Drummond would suggest that there is "an incongruity" between Mr. Lodge's oath to uphold the Constitution on the one hand, and his favoring some kind of federal aid for private and parochial schools, on the other. Why, then, should the charge be made against Catholics who urge the same course?

On questions like these there is ample constitu-

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tional room for a wide variety of opinions. And in all such cases it seems to us that no one particular interpretation should ever be glorified as *the* constitutional position, the opinion one must hold to in order to be a good American. This may be an obvious point, but as we see it this is precisely the mistake Mr. Drummond made in his comments on Catholics and the school issue.

THE BRITISH LITERARY SCENE

NOT LONG ago the London *Times* devoted a special section to "The American Imagination," and considered the achievement of Americans in various areas: literature, painting, music, television, ballet, philosophy, science, religion, architecture. The result was an informative assessment of the present situation in America and shrewd speculation about the future.

Now the *Times*, in another special supplement, has attempted the same kind of description of "The British Imagination." There are many separate judgments that will be of interest to American readers, for the importance which is granted an author in a foreign country is frequently quite different from that accorded by his own countrymen. For example, in an account of the English novel that mentions C. P. Snow, Anthony Powell, William Golding, L. P. Hartley and others, it is somewhat surprising to read:

"One ends where one began, with regret that our novelists find it so difficult to show convincingly the details of ordinary lives. In a sense all our writers evade this, and the reality they picture is the sum of such evasions. . . . It seemed likely that Mr. [Graham] Greene and Mr. [Angus] Wilson, rather than the other writers mentioned here, are guides towards the novel's future development in this country. It is likely to be inclusive rather than exclusive, to welcome the new features of society rather than to ignore them. Not less art, but more life, is what the novel chiefly needs today."

It is also interesting, and surprising, to read a discussion of "literature and morality" in which the key figures are still I. A. Richards, F. R. Leavis, D. H. Lawrence, and which concludes: "The decisive fact is this: if our deepest convictions about the greatest literature is that it is an original force, a great vitalizer of life operating at the profoundest level, we must in the end recognize a fundamental inadequacy in the whole current diction of question and answer, analysis and discrimination, statement and meaning. No thinking in such categories, however qualified, however intensified, will bring thought to a point where it embodies the truth that demands embodiment first. . . ."

These statements, and the longer considerations of which they are a part, have even greater interest when one realizes that they have their American counterparts. Mary McCarthy, for example, in a recent issue of *Partisan Review*, wrote an article entitled "The Fact in Fiction" which deserves comparison with the general judgment of the British critic on the novel. And there are several American critics, the most recent and violent being Karl Shapiro, who have rejected the critical terms and attitudes which have long prevailed in the literary academy and who have called for a thorough re-evaluation of critical values.

But these comparisons, which could be extended, emphasize what has become increasingly clear. It is difficult to discuss English and American literature and thought apart from each other. Not that some distinct qualities in the "American Imagination" or the "British Imagination" cannot be distinguished and isolated; the British supplement does, after all, have a section on "Snobbery: Singular Saxon Attitudes," which does not seem called for in the American supplement. And those distinguishing traits find their way into the art, literature, even science and religion.

In a consideration of the comic vision, for instance, the *Times* writer says that a sense of humor is the most prized of British possessions. "Such a national characteristic," he writes, "is bound to spill over into literature, and the most striking difference between the British and the American novel over the past half century is the comic approach made by British novelists, compared with their American counterparts. Compare H. G. Wells, Aldous Huxley, Graham Greene—all of them writers using the form of the novel—with Dreiser, Sinclair Lewis, Norman Mailer, and it is immediately apparent that for the American humor is superimposed, when for the British writer it is a natural medium of expression."

For some American readers the humor here will be in the writers compared—it does, after all, overlook writers as different as Ring Lardner, J. D. Salinger and James Purdy. Still, the basic comparison is meaningful and can be developed.

Perhaps most interesting of all, in the comparisons, is that the British critics rarely imply superiority. And in what the future holds forth, more than one critic looks first to the American writers, or to those British writers who are most conscious of American writing.

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The Case of Jean Genet

The harshest terms which are applied to Genet he uses as the principal themes of his own work

by WALLACE FOWLIE

THE BOOKS OF M. Jean Genet are no longer clandestine publications. The general story of his life is publicly discussed, and has been enriched with all the variations of a legend. His plays are now being performed in the professional theatres of several countries. The importance of his art has now won an official widespread recognition which justifies the prediction in the forties of such prophets as Jean Paulhan, Jean Cocteau, Jean-Paul Sartre, Picasso, and even François Mauriac.

These men, with varying degrees of moral reservation, proclaimed Genet's exceptional gifts as a writer at a time when his works were sold in expensive limited editions to a very small public. During the fifties, the Gallimard edition of some of his books appeared, and translations into English of his books were made by Bernard Frechtman—translations which have not yet been allowed in the United States or in the United Kingdom. The plays, in English translation, are published by Grove Press in New York.

Genet had no family and was brought up as a ward of the nation (*pupille de la nation.*) For theft he was sent to a reformatory school at fifteen. From sixteen on, he was often in prison. He was thrown out of five countries on various counts. He deserted the Foreign Legion, he sold saccharine illegally in Yugoslavia, stole cattle in Albania, was a pickpocket in Venice, created an early system of blackmarketing in Berlin. Between the years 1937 and 1943, he was sentenced thirteen times, of which eight were for the theft of books, first editions of Rimbaud and Léon Bloy! In prison in 1943, he wrote the poem *Condamné à Mort,* which was shown to Cocteau who immediately intervened in order to bring about Genet's liberation. A letter written to the prefect of police in Paris by Henri Mondor, the famous physician and biographer of Mallarmé, was instrumental in expediting the release. The letter stressed the point that all obstacles which might impede the development of this man's poetic genius should be removed.

The harshest terms which the world has used in its indictment of Genet: thief, traitor, invert—are used by himself in his own writing as his principal themes, as the subject matter of his novels. He began writing in prison with the avowed purpose of composing a new moral order which would be his. His desire was to discover and construct a moral order which would explain and allow his mode of life. All of his early commentators spoke, with considerable wonderment, of two matters in particular: the unusual boldness of Genet's themes which would seem at that time to exclude the books forever from accessible editions, and the ease with which this writer, from the very start, from his very first books, wrote in a style and with a profundity of thought, which placed him in the category of "great writers." To reach, with so little preparation, the highest rank in literary art, was almost as shocking to the first readers of Genet as his obvious determination to glorify evil as it appears in those forms which are the most rigorously castigated by society.

GENET CELEBRATES those particular manifestations of evil which he knew personally. His books are blatantly or indirectly autobiographical. The central drama is always the struggle between the man in authority and the young man to whom he is attracted. The psychological varieties of this struggle are many. Each of the novels and each of the plays is a different world in which the same drama unfolds. *Querelle de Brest* is the ship: naval officers and sailors. *Pompes Funèbres* is the Occupation: Nazi officers and young Frenchmen of the capital. *Notre-Dame des Fleurs* is Montmartre, with its world of male prostitutes and pimps. *Le Miracle de la Rose* is the prison, with the notorious convicts and their slaves.

The play *Haute-Surveillance* (*Deathwatch*) is also

Mr. Fowlie, whose numerous publications include studies of Claudel and Cocteau, is a member of the faculty at Bennington College, Vermont.

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the prison cell with its intricate hierarchy of criminals where those standing under the death sentence exert the greatest power and prestige over those with lesser sentences. *Les Bonnes* (*The Maids*) is the household, where in the absence of the mistress one of the maids plays her part. *Les Nègres,* which has been an outstanding theatrical success this past season in Paris, is the world of colonialism: the conflict between whites and Negroes. But it is much more than a satire on colonialism. The oppression from which the Negroes of Genet suffer is so hostile, so incomprehensible, as to be easily the oppression of mankind. The hostility which Genet persistently celebrates throughout all of his work, in his opulent language, is the strangely distorted love joining the saint and the criminal, the guard and the prisoner, the policeman and the thief, the master and the slave, the white and the black.

The hallucinatory beauty with which Jean Genet has expressed his system of morality and his philosophy of evil increases the difficulty of defining his tradition and assessing his worth. He is the arch-romantic, far more the artist than the philosopher. His nature is essentially religious. His is also a nature of extreme passivity. In this sense he is more comparable to Baudelaire than to Rimbaud or Lautréamont. He is the opposite of the revolutionist and the reformer. He is the man who lives just outside of the normally-constituted society. He has no desire to play a part in society, and especially no desire to mount in society, to triumph over it. In this sense, he is the opposite of Balzac's Rastignac and Stendhal's Sorel. He floats on society as if it were the sea, but never directs by the propulsion of his will a course through the waters.

THE SOCIETY into which Genet was born, with its laws and institutions, is dominated by the male. This is the kind of society which instinctively will tend to exclude Genet and to crush him. The virile types he exalts in his writings are traitors and criminals. At a very early age evil became for him synonymous with virility. (*Mal and mâle* have the same sound in French.) Between the ages of sixteen and thirty, he sought in his reformatories and prisons and bars not a series of transitory adventures, but a way of identifying himself with the individuals he met there and whom he admired. Love, rather than being a joining with what was different from himself, became the impossible search for self-identification with what was different from himself. Every night the intricate ceremonial of search, far more cerebral than physical, would be performed, until the inevitable failure became part of the ceremonial.

The myth of Rimbaud, as formulated by his critics and biographers and exhaustively studied by Etiemble, made the poet into either a supernatural being, god or demon, or into the type of intractable convict. Etiemble believes that this myth, so variously interpreted in the thirties and forties, has today split into four other myths which our contemporary world is trying to understand: the myths of Lorca, T. E. Lawrence, Artaud and Genet. For the formulation of his "myth," Genet had the good fortune to attract the attention of one of the most forceful thinkers of our day. Jean-Paul Sartre. In a six-hundred-page book, *Saint Genet, comédien et martyr,* the philosopher elaborately analyzes why he believes that Jean Genet incarnates existentialist freedom.

The life story of Genet is cited by Sartre as a case history. As a baby he was abandoned by his mother and raised in an orphan asylum. He committed thefts and was sent to a reformatory. He escaped and lived by begging, stealing and prostitution. In other words, he gave himself over to what the world calls crime and evil. Then he turned to writing and in rapid succession produced books which are apologies of evil and which could not be printed and sold in the usual way. Then the time came when his books were permitted, when his plays were produced, and when he reached the status of a recognized writer of importance. After society had determined meticulously and repeatedly what Jean Genet was, after his "case" had been defined and publicized, this criminal became something else. He became a writer and a poet, and hence, according to Sartre, practised his freedom, chose his own life and defined himself.

This experience of Genet is the basis of Sartre's long investigation into the problem of evil. He does not conceal the shocking elements in the writings of Genet. He uses them in a purely philosophical way in order to describe the human anguish of this man. Sartre never forgets that the subject of his study is a man ostracized by society. He finds in Genet's revindication of evil the only form of dignity vouchsafed him.

THE CONCEPT of sovereignty has always obsessed the imagination of Genet. Sartre believes that he chose evil because that was precisely the realm in which he could hope to reach a status of sovereignty. In *Le Miracle de la Rose,* in those passages where the character Harcamone is meditating in his cell, the ideal of sovereignty is ascribed to the assassin who is about to be executed. The state of evil is the reverse of the state of holiness. Genet plays on the two words because he finds them similar in the sense that the extremes of both are forbidden to an ordinary man, and that both are characterized by violence and danger.

In discussing his sympathy for Genet, Sartre makes very clear his conviction that evil is a myth created by the respectable members of society. They tend to call Genet wicked and to use him as a scapegoat who committed the acts which they have been tempted to commit, and which they may or may not have committed.

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In *Saint Genet,* Sartre demonstrates that he has no respect for theology, and that he scorns the attitude of those respectable citizens who allowed Genet to be condemned in the police courts. It is a familiar thought whereby the bourgeois falsely represents the good, and certain scapegoat criminals incarnate evil.

The theme of alienation is prevalent in contemporary literature, but it has never been orchestrated so richly, with such tragic and sensual poignancy, as in Genet's books. The existences evoked in his novels and plays, which are obviously his own existence, at least to some extent, cannot find their realization. These characters fully understand how estranged, how alienated they are, and they are both obsessed and fascinated by this state. The anomalies Genet sings of as if they were the noblest themes for a poet are all present in *Ies Bonnes,* and no play in the contemporary French theatre is more cruel in its intention, more capable of bewildering, exasperating and scandalizing an audience.

Far more subversive than *Les Bonnes* is the newer play *Les Nègres,* which was one of the outstanding successes of the 1959-1960 season in Paris. No objections, no prohibitions followed these performances of a text which derides some of the most sacrosanct principles of the West. It is a long liturgy of hate. A theatrical scandal, but a triumph of language and dramaturgy. In this play the characters are conscious that they are actors, as the characters in Genet's novels are conscious that they are alienated from the normal world.

IT WOULD seem that the revelation of Genet is too shocking for it to be prohibited! He is telling us that we live close beside the worst kind of moral distress, that which creates monsters. His revelations may well confirm the latent suspicion in all of us that literature is not innocent but guilty. His books are not composed as rules for life and conduct. They are creations of his mind. His characters are not himself but the heroes of his mind. His works belong to a literature of delirium and hagiography.

It is erroneous and misleading to link the names of Genet and Sade. The philosophical system of Sade, if it is ever fully revealed and clarified, will doubtless establish his quasi-theological theory of evil. His denial of the existence of God led him quite naturally to the denial of the existence of his fellow man. Today Mme. Simone de Beauvoir is justified in seeing him as a precursor of the *poètes maudits,* and in placing him at the head of a lineage of blasphemers: Lautréamont, Nietzsche, Jarry.

But Jean Genet is not a philosopher, and he is not a blasphemer. He is the artist who feels guilty by his very being. He explained his return to France, after crossing so many frontiers in his search, as a desire to accuse himself in his own language.

NEGLECTED PLAYWRIGHT

Discovery of Ghelderode

by SAMUEL DRAPER

DURING A recent visit with Michel de Ghelderode in his home in Brussels, I ventured a characterization of him and his work, the keynote of which was *"Vous n'êtes pas au monde, ni à votre place, ni dans votre costume, ni dans votre époque."* I meant to suggest that Ghelderode's spiritual insight encases him in prodigious solitude, dislocates him, forbids him appropriate dress, and places him in a different time. Ghelderode's immediate response: "I have been understood . . . that indeed is a rarity."

Understanding him, as he declared, may truly be a rarity, but, due to the efforts of Eric Bentley, it should become less rare in this country. It was Eric Bentley who first talked to me of Ghelderode's genius as an *homme de théâtre,* as a visionary and recluse whose startling responses to life and man enlighten and delight us. Fortunately for all engaged in the theater, Bentley made his own discovery of Ghelderode during the Paris theatrical season of 1949, became absorbed by his power and abundant vitality, and now is principally responsible for the current first volume of the Belgian dramatist's work in English. *Michel de Ghelderode: Seven Plays* (Trans. by George Hauger. Hill and Wang. $1.95.) This is a fine volume marred only by the inept translation, far too literary and British to seem natural here, and too awkward to be suited to the stage.

Why did even the French, who introduced us to Ghelderode, take two decades in discovering this neglected playwright, most of whose plays were written

Mr. Draper, who recently returned from Belgium, is now working on a biography of Ghelderode.

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in the twenties and thirties? There are several reasons. The *esprit français* cannot abide Ghelderode's "unique" French language, Germanic in structure and nature, and Latin in expression. Ghelderode piles up words, throws adjectives on the straining syntax, burns up and suffocates traditional French, which is precise and analytical. As if he cannot find enough words, Ghelderode disarticulates standard French in order to forge neologisms strong with archaic consonances. He is not satisfied with existing words—they are not vibrant enough to express the energy of life's forces.

To the French a love theme in the theater is hypnotic, and no Ghelderode play dramatizes *l'intrigue amoureuse*. Perhaps this is why he has never been wildly acclaimed in France nor taken to the French heart. Although his work is esteemed in France and played continuously, his art is not understood by the French. In order to characterize the Nordic or Flemish essence of Ghelderode's dramas which also have a Spanish touch, we must evoke Shakespeare, Ibsen and Strindberg, Calderón, and Lorca.

"IT IS IMPORTANT to emphasize the Spanish quality of my work," Ghelderode reminds us, "although I have been pure Flemish for centuries; but such has been the heritage of certain ancestral marriages that I have been the recipient of the nostalgia and the presentiments of the Spanish, a proud and violent race which has not yet said its last word. My experience has been that when Lorca and Ghelderode were played on the same program, the first seemed Flemish and the second Spanish. Interesting, isn't it?"

Flanders, having been captured through the centuries by its painters and musicians, had not found its dramatic author until Ghelderode put on the stage Flemish truculence and mysticism. *Lord Halewyn* constitutes an ancient Flemish song, highly dramatic, an animated painting by Brueghel. In this decor described minutely, the characters are finely chiseled. Not conventional and stereotyped characters which recent theater has provided us, they are a strangely real humanity, highly colored, provocatively named, palpable presences whose odor we almost discern. Such sulphuric plays boil and overflow with action. There are no hollow moments, analytical monologues or polished Wildean dialogues. Instead Ghelderode gives us an incessant whirlwind of characters and events. Played *presto,* a Ghelderode spectacle never allowed anyone to yawn or fall asleep.

Built upon a captivating and dynamic situation, his plays are far removed from the harmonious unfolding of a well-oiled Scribian plot. Although the actors perform throughout the drama, their actions merely describe them. They are acting in a void; their efforts will not change the situation nor themselves. Their obstinacy will have led them to death, but in the end nothing will have been resolved, nothing explained. The curtain comes down, but the drama continues. As in Ghelderode's *Christopher Columbus,* each character seems to say: "I am old and I have not lived; I have traveled far and find myself nowhere; I have seen a great deal and learned little. I have gone through many motions and have accomplished nothing."

The animation in Ghelderode's theater comes uniquely from his vitality, a mania for life, quite rare in present Europe, quite out of step with our time. But Ghelderode belongs to times past, to the Renaissance, for example. No matter how desperate his heroes are, nor in what drastic circumstances they find themselves, they do not shrug their shoulders, "What's the use?" From the excess of their *malheur* comes an increase in their courage. Ghelderode's work transcends the dramas of his contemporaries who are trying to classify, dissect, prove, disprove, and cure mankind's psychosis and neurosis, playwrights who are dealing with the problems of divorce, homosexuality, delinquency, television, tranquilizers and vitamin pills.

WHERE OUR modern writers try to point out rational explanations for our illnesses, Ghelderode uncovers evils found in times past—and still very much of today. He is revolting against the evil of our time, but he costumes such evils as befitting the past.

"Nothing could be created more eternal, more proud and more audacious than human flesh which smells of the perfume of ashes," Ghelderode has written. All his dramatic works illustrate this thought. His exuberant desire for life, his prodigality, the orgy of vitality which sounds through everything, lend to Ghelderode's style an extraordinary thoughtfulness. On one hand he exemplifies life; on the other, death. Creating a paradox, Ghelderode contrasts the warm colors of life with that disquieting black silhouette. Death hovers, broods, and soars in Ghelderode. Death is his favorite theme and his best friend.

Purmelende says in *Lord Halewyn,* "She saw the sword. Upward it whirled with a hissing sound, and I saw—for it was I who did the deed—a shrieking head bounding across the snow. I ran after it and caught it in mid-air. I wedged it between my knees and filled the gaping mouth with snow to stifle its blasphemies. And I said, 'Pray to God now, my lord, since you are dying. . . .'" More than once Death is personified as a character who appears on the stage and off stage, too.

In Ghelderode's living room filled with light and shadow, among the life-sized mannequins, antique furniture, absurd objects, headless dolls, Ensor masks, and paintings of Bosch and Velasquez, one feels an environment more appropriate to the sixteenth century than to our own. In this mysterious and eloquent setting, Ghelderode often talked of death. "I have a great curiosity about death. I wonder if it is not the

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most beautiful thing that possibly could be proposed to us—how impatient I am! I believe in life after death and in Paradise. I am spiritually inclined and will always remain so. I have always had the desire to live in the world to come. Some call it a better planet. Yes, I believe in it. Yes, I do. I am a poet just for that reason. My entire work has been centered around death. But it is death which is not a philosophy, a sociology or any kind of ideology. I want to remain free and alone as I have always been—even before the Good Priest, even before Death itself, even before God."

Pantagleize, a farce to make one sad, created in the grand manner, was inspired by the motion picture, and unlike most Ghelderode plays takes place in modern times. A philosopher with peaceful intentions, Pantagleize sets in motion cataclysms without realizing his enormous influence. One day he greets all those he meets with "What a lovely day!" a phrase that starts a war by the anarchists, a revolution which finally claims his life. Pantagleize dies umbrella in hand murmuring "What a lovely day!"

"He is the Poet," Ghelderode says, "the incarnation of the poet, unfit for anything except love, friendship and ardor—a failure, therefore, in our utilitarian age which pushes out onto the fringe everything that is unproductive, that does not pay dividends. A useless mouth to feed! He is the last poet who believes in heavenly voices, in revelation, in our divine origin. He is bound to Parsifal by purity and to Don Quixote by courage and holy madness. And if he dies, it is because, particularly in our time, the Innocents must be slaughtered: that has been the law since the time of Jesus. Amen!"

AFTER READING *Barabbas* and *The Women at the Tomb,* it would be easy to say that Ghelderode is a Christian author or a Catholic playwright, but such a classification would not be justified nor even accurate. Ghelderode is not a Christian poet like Bernanos or Péguy, who emphasize a polemical message. If one unites the sensuality of Gide with the spirituality of Claudel, he obtains an amalgam of what Ghelderode believes. Alternation between these two extremes is perhaps what makes Ghelderode's drama human.

This infernal, charnel theater, sulphuric and convulsed, scorching the heart and squeezing the mind, is dominated by cardinal virtues and capital sins. Using the same vocabulary, Ghelderode blasphemes and praises God; he employs the same Psalms and sacramental phrases in the most scabrous scenes as well as in the most pious. For Heaven and Hell there is the same language. Ghelderode's plays confront their characters with both extremes and never harbor them from good and evil. Anguished, Mother Jaire calls out for light . . . "a little light . . ."

That Good and Evil exist is Ghelderode's symphonic theme; both remain undecipherable mysteries; both are insoluble. But Ghelderode never takes sides. He remains an observer, outside of his drama. Ghelderode's Christianity is heavy and disquieting, somber, and Flemish, not impressive and majestic like Péguy's or exultant and lyrical like Claudel's. When the latter says the only reality is Divine Joy, Ghelderode cries, "An angel sits on my shoulder, a devil wiggles in my pocket."

What is the answer to the mystery of Good and Evil? "Don't you know," asks Ghelderode, "that mysteries have no answers?" Life's enigmas are posed without hope of solution, but the lost key does not prevent man from expressing his *maxima reverentia* due to God. Look at Ghelderode's Saint Francis who is seen dancing! Yes, in a transport of Joy, Francis danced among his brothers. He was happy, and this was his way of praising the Lord and creation: he danced.

THERE ARE A NUMBER

There are a number of insanities
In the world
And my grandfather had them all!

Let us suppose that one fine day
You wished to go
To the other end of the world

In an ox-cart. "Aha," he would cry,
"Aha!
Hurry, my little man,

Hurry, my child, run and bring
My prayer shawl
And the pots of clay,

And three pieces of cheese,
Two onions
And six pieces of well-salted meat,

Two strong shoes and a pair
Of cotton socks
And one convenient shirt.

When one goes on such a long
Journey,
When one is finally serious,

When one really undertakes
To go
It would be a shame not to be ready."

LEONARD WOLF.

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Poetry of Contact

by SAMUEL HAZO

IN *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry,* Jacques Maritain has written that "it is difficult for a modern poet not to be a child of modern man." If this statement is even partially true, and if modern man, as we are reminded to the point of cliché, lives in a culture that contains within it the seeds of its own disintegration, it would seem inevitable that the poetic vision of any poet would reflect the tension created by the tug toward integration on the one hand and the forces of disintegration on the other. Such an ambivalence has created an age of anxiety, containment or austerity, depending upon whether one chooses the term of W. H. Auden, R. W. B. Lewis or Marguerite Higgins, and the impact of anxiety, containment and austerity has created the inescapable challenge that mid-century poets have had to face in creating a poetry in contact with its time.

Since every poet must face the facts of life within his own age before he can refuse, accept or transcend them, it is interesting to note how the mid-century poets of America have done so, and it is equally interesting to note how the resources of Christianity have helped them to do so. I am speaking now of those poets (and certainly not all of them) who have written during the forties and fifties, and I speak of the spirit incarnated in their poetry and not of any supra-literary allegiance paid by any of them to a particular orthodoxy.

Basic to the observations that will follow is one of the poet's fundamental disciplines: that he must see clearly before he can express or interpret what he sees, whether consciously or instinctively. The poet begins, as Mark Van Doren has noted, with the facts of life, as opposed to the scientist, who ends with them. I have chosen to identify this expression of what a poet sees or begins with as the poetry of contact. The poetry of contact is essentially another name for the articulation of the poetic vision in relation to its time.

There are basically three possible results of this type of contact—retreat, engagement or transcendence. The poetry of retreat is a poetry characterized by disgust, aversion or a number of symptoms of escape. The poetry of engagement attempts to affirm and capture the world of fact as phenomena. The poetry of transcendence sees within and beyond the point of contact and tries to see that point in an evaluative way. But all three of these alternatives begin with contact, with the confrontation of the poetic subject or the poetic idea, and proceed in the mystery of the creative act toward the translation and perfection of that vision in the clay of words.

The poetry of retreat is really a poetry of refusal. Almost all of the best mid-century poetry which confronts the more unpalatable aspects of contemporary life has something of the poetry of retreat about it. But not all such poetry is able to rise above this. Indeed, one of the misfortunes of some contemporary talents is their inability to rise above their own negativism. Among the Beatnik poets that I have read I have noted this tendency. The failure of much of this poetry, which is often erratically brilliant, is that its writers have orgied in their own disappointment and chagrin. They have made contact; they have seen, and often quite clearly, but they have salvaged little from such contact beyond indignation, disgust and, at times, self-pity.

OF THE Beatniks Gene Feldman has said that "the Square has his suburbia with a picture window looking out over a graveyard, or he kids himself by chalking political slogans on subway stations. But the man who is Beat knows that he is alone, and that his problem is to learn to live with this knowledge. As a consequence, his concern is primarily one of self-exploration, of perceiving the self in terms of its connection with immediate experience. Not capable of the act of faith required by a belief in tomorrow, the Beat Man values relationships only as they tend to reveal the truth of his present existence."

Without going into the Existential implications of this credo, it seems to me that its negativism is apparent. By denying the possibility of an act of faith in tomorrow, which is not necessarily the chronological tomorrow nor a bigger-and-better tomorrow, the Beatnik disrupts the continuity of life itself. Despite his possible claims to the contrary, he goes from being anti-society to being anti-life. His poetry often becomes a form of intellectual striptease. Occasionally he resolves his condition in the manner of the final act of a Tennessee Williams play—by bitterness, breakdown, loss of mind

Mr. Hazo, a number of whose poems have been published in The Commonweal, is on the faculty at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh.

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or hope, or, as in the case of Carl Solomon, psychosis itself. Consider, for example, the tone of these few lines from Allen Ginsberg's "Howl":

I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness, striving hysterical naked,
dragging themselves through the negro streets at dawn looking for an angry fix . . .

who scribbled all night rocking and rolling over lofty incantations
which in the yellow morning were stanzas of gibberish . . .

I'm with you in Rockland
where fifty more shocks will never return your soul to its body
again from its pilgrimage to a cross in the void.
(from Howl and Other Poems, © City Lights Books)

This is not an apocalypse for America despite its Whitman-like pretensions. It is more the rhetoric rather than the poetry of disgust and finally despair. But the poetry of retreat is not only exemplified by some of the Beatnik poets. It may also manifest itself as a poetry of retreat into phrase or mere word-play, or into a type of personal mystique or highly personal vocabulary bristling with recondite symbolism. I am not condemning these things, which for some poets are necessary I suppose, but only indicating some of the symptoms of poetry when it is not able to maintain its contact.

The poetry of engagement attempts to affirm and capture the world of fact. In simplest terms, it is a poetry that is able to hold its ground before the moment without really interpreting it in an evaluative way. It is concerned with seizure, with holding the line. The poet's concern is with the moment or the fact which he has accepted—a moment with which he is in contact. The poet of engagement simply wishes to remain in contact, in a one-dimensional if not a multi-dimensional sense.

In its attempt to keep in contact with its time by remaining engaged, mid-century American poetry has achieved a memorable poetry of contact. Poems of this type have formed the majority of those selections included in recent all-poetry issues of magazines like the *American Scholar,* the *Saturday Review* and the now defunct *Western Review*. Almost all of these poems are lyrics, and the best of them could easily stand to be compared with any other poetry of engagement of any other time. Developing primarily though not exclusively from the Imagistic tradition, such poetry is characterized by unique focus, admirable experimentation in word usage and prosody, and a successful capturing of what Hopkins once and for all called the inscape of the poetic subject. Poets like John Fandel in "The Watch," Ned O'Gorman in "The Rose and the Body of the Rose," Sister Maura in *The Word is Love,* John Frederick Nims in numerous poems in *The Iron Pastoral* and Louis Simpson in the following poem called "The Boarder" from *A Dream of Governors* reveal this aspect of the poetry of contact:

The time is after dinner. Cigarettes
Glow on the lawn;
Glasses begin to tinkle; TV sets
Have been turned on.

The moon is brimming like a glass of beer
Above the town,
And love keeps her appointments—"Harry's here!"
"I'll be right down."

But the pale stranger in the furnished room
Lies on his back
Looking at paper roses, how they bloom,
And ceilings crack.
(from A Dream of Governors,
© Wesleyan University Press)

THE POETRY of transcendence exceeds and fulfills the poetry of engagement in much the same way in which union exceeds and fulfills desire or communion exceeds and fulfills aspiration. It is characterized by a seeing through as well as with the eye, to borrow the language of Blake. Only the poet's love enables him to transmute the poetry of engagement into the poetry of transcendence. This love, suffusing his poetic vision, enables the poet to see within and beyond the point of contact; it rinses the eye so that it sees without distortion. It creates the climate for evaluative expression and for the articulation of what is biblically called prophetic vision. It taps the resources of love within the poet, and, to the extent that love is the coronal of the Christian, it taps the resources of Christianity within him in the unconscious but connatural way that Maritain has so beautifully described as "the divination of the spiritual in the things of sense" and in the spirit in which T. S. Eliot spoke in the thirties when he somewhat hopefully anticipated a literature that "would be unconsciously, rather than deliberately and defiantly, Christian."

The poetry of transcendence is truly a "divination." Some American poets have realized this. Hart Crane showed such an awareness when he wrote in 1929 that modern poetry should be based "on the articulation of the contemporary human consciousness *sub specie aeternitatis,* and inclusive of all readjustments incident to science and other shifting factors related to that consciousness." The following three poets, Philip Booth, W. D. Snodgrass and Robert Lowell, from whose work I will quote, reveal this same awareness.

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In "Letter from a Distant Land," Philip Booth, addressing himself to Henry Thoreau, contrasts the Walden of today with the Walden of Thoreau's day. The contrast speaks for itself, but the transcendence of Booth's poem emerges in the way in which the contrast indicts the time and simultaneously incorporates itself into the fabric of the poet's vision. One feels the creative tension produced by the clash and mingling of the timeless spirit of poetry that is present in the poem as opposed to the shoddy and even ugly circumstances of the time.

So far, your Concord has seen four more wars.
Vegetables are high. The streets are filled
with tourists. Cheap people in expensive cars
patrol the Sunday roads. An acre sold
in 1849 sells now two hundred times
the price. Lexington is houses sprawled
on desert-dusty streets with fertile names . . .
Beside the ministry of waves, the times
of men are seasons, windfall seeds that spill
toward fruit: the perfect globe or wormy shames
of Adam. All poets climb back Eden's hill
within their own backyard.

(from Letter from a Distant Land, © The Viking Press)

The second excerpt is from W. D. Snodgrass' "April Inventory." The poem as a whole deals with the beauty that is able to survive specialization and categorization. The transcendence of the poem derives from the ability of the poet to rise above mere indictment, to affirm as well as deride without losing his poetic balance.

The tenth time, just a year ago,
I made myself a little list
Of all the things I'd ought to know,
Then told my parents, analysts,
And everyone who's trusted me
I'd be substantial, presently.

I haven't read one book about
A book or memorized one plot.
Or found a mind I did not doubt.
I learned one date. And then forgot.
And one by one the solid scholars
Get the degrees, the jobs, the dollars . . .

Though trees turn bare and girls turn wives,
We shall afford our costly seasons;
There is a gentleness survives
That will outspeak and has its reasons.
There is a loveliness exists,
Preserves us, not for specialists.

(from Heart's Needle, © Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.)

The third example of transcendence is from Robert Lowell's first and, for me, his most significant work, *Lord Weary's Castle*. Through biblical imagery and an apocalyptic tone, Lowell poetically comments upon his New England environs in "Children of Light." The transcendence is realized through the poem's basic irony which stems from the awareness that New England's founders brought with them from the old world not only their aspirations but humanity's original and primal faults that are as old as the lost Eden and the banished Cain.

Our fathers wrung their bread from stocks and stones
And fenced their gardens with the Redman's bones
Embarking from the Nether Land of Holland,
Pilgrims unhouseled by Geneva's night,
They planted here the Serpent's seeds of light;
And here the pivoting searchlights probe to shock
The riotous glass houses built on rock,
And candles gutter by an empty altar,
And light is where the landless blood of Cain
Is burning, burning the unburied grain.

(from Lord Weary's Castle, © Harcourt, Brace and Co.,

THESE few touchstone passages reveal the poetry of contact in transcendence. I could cite other poems by other poets which succeed in a similar way as I think Richard Wilbur does in *Things of This World* as John Logan does in *Cycle for Mother Cabrini;* as Daniel Berrigan and William Meredith ("Notre Dame de Chartres") and Edgar Bowers ("The Virgin Mary") do in a more consistently poetic way than Thomas Merton; as Donald Hall and John Hollander do not except occasionally, in comparison with poets such as John Ciardi, James Wright, Elizabeth Bishop and Isabella Gardner.

However, to continue with such purely personal adjudications is to prolong rather than confirm a point. And the point is that contact is poetry's common clay that every serious poet cannot help but incarnate his poetic vision in relation to his time. This incarnation remains the inescapable challenge to poetry at any time changing only in the means and depth and character of its expression from age to age, poet to poet, and often, from poem to poem, but at the same time changeless in its revelation of retreat, engagement or transcendence.

As the poet lacks love (and the hope and faith that it engenders), to the extent of his lack does he retreat. As he possesses love, so is he able to confront and at least affirm in a purely objective way the world before him. His poetry may not ascend, but it does not fall either, and, at its best, it can be beautifully buoyant. To the extent that the poet's love energizes or sacramentalizes his vision, to just that extent is he able to fulfill the exhortation of Matthew Arnold to see life steadily and to see it whole, to become, in other terms, the *poesis* of Aristotle, to find the voice "that will outspeak and has its reasons."

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Why Literary History?

by WILLIAM ESTY

DAVID DAICHES—a Scottish Jewish scholar who has taught in American universities, a frequent contributor to American literary magazines, and currently a Cambridge don—says, in his introduction to *A Critical History of English Literature* (Ronald Press. $12.50): "This is an age of specialist scholars, and for one man to attempt a complete history of English literature is now both rash and unusual." Unusual and rash, indeed. This sort of thing—two volumes, over eleven hundred pages, everything from the Anglo-Saxons to Virginia Woolf—has been out of fashion for some time now. The question is, *should it* be out of fashion?

Mr. Daiches' kind of U-2 flight over fourteen hundred years of literature is not, of course, as "impossible" as it would have been ten or fifteen years ago. Then, the New Criticism reigned. But more recently, as Lionel Trilling shrewdly remarked, we have all grown rather tired of Criticism—by which he meant the minute, detailed dissection of short poems or of the metaphorical structure of a single novel—"pressing hard" on the text. History has come back as something it is respectable to take seriously in forming critical judgments; even what used to be caustically dismissed as "impressionism" has rewon a degree of tolerance. So it is time to look again with unbigoted eyes on the broad historical survey, the telescopic as opposed to the microscopic view. What do we find? What are the strengths and weaknesses of the method?

First, one must admire the sheer energy and staying-power of Mr. Daiches. He has read so much, he has cared for what he read, and he has worked intimidatingly hard. Then, one is grateful to him for the wealth of quotation in his volumes, quotation which sometimes makes his point most effectively, as when he compares Marlowe's sonorous use of place-names with that of Shakespeare and Milton, pointing up Marlowe's pioneer role. Also, there is here a mass of concisely-given information: one can quickly "bone up" on the north-to-south movement of the East Midland dialect in medival England, the sources of legends and the nature of the literary materials drawn upon by poets and dramatists, the possible causes of the rise of the ideal of courtly love, how Troilus and Cressida figured in medieval literature before Chaucer, etc., etc. There are many shorthand indications of what "recent critical opinion" is on a number of points. Plots are summarized and technical devices duly noted. We learn of every "movement" and its relation to every other.

However, even these virtues have their drawbacks, drawbacks apparently inherent in the form called "literary history." The author's energy soon becomes wearying—that sensible voice does go on and *on*. Everything must be touched on, every writer, trend, tendency glanced at, even if only in a sentence. The camera will not leave one inch of terrain unphotographed. And even the welcome extended quotations are too usually just the ones we expect to see, and are not really often used for *criticism*, as Mr. Daiches suggests in his introduction they are meant to be used.

"LITERARY HISTORY" produces, willy-nilly, listmaking: sentences like this abound: "If the *Romance of the Rose* and the poetry of Machaut and Froissart and Deschamps were important to him [Chaucer], so were Virgil's *Aeneid*, Ovid's *Heroides* and *Metamorphoses*, Lucan's *Pharsalia*, Statius' *Thebaid*, Boethius' *De Consolatione Philosophiae* (which he translated), Macrobius' commentary on the *Somnium Scipionis* of Cicero, the Troy stories of Dares Phrygius and Dictys Cretensis and of later writers, Pope Innocent III's *De Contemptu Mundi* (which he apparently also translated), and much patristic literature, to say nothing of the Vulgate, the Latin liturgy of the Church, vast numbers of medieval romances, and a miscellaneous assortment of medieval scientific, religious, historical, and entertaining works." And it is a weariness of the flesh to read so many plot-summaries of one novel after another, one poem after another, one play after another. Everything is remorselessly "placed": "Marvell's political satire looks back to Cleveland's and forward to Dryden's."

Even the attempts to sum up the complex meanings of a given work take on a laundry-list flavor: "The combined knowledge of man's nobility and his weakness, the sense of man's looking back or forward to a golden age coupled with the knowledge that, partly because of the very characteristics of man as man, such

Mr. Esty is a critic and writer whose literary studies have appeared in the *New Republic*, The Commonweal and other American journals.

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a golden age can be envisioned but never realized, the sense that man's life is governed by chance and linked always with the movements of the day to night and back to day, with the passing of the seasons, with resolutions that fluctuate and moods that alter, but a sense, too, that only a determination to do what can be done at the moment of decision can ever achieve anything—all this and a thousand more such archetypical ideas are carried alive and passionately into the mind of the reader by *Paradise Lost.*" All this is textbook stuff, useful no doubt to a student about to take an exam, but of what service to the rest of us? Yet Mr. Daiches believes he has achieved something other than one more textbook: "it is intended less as a work of reference than as a work of description, explanation and critical interpretation. It is not meant to be looked up, but to be read . . . the word 'critical' in my title is important."

THE INTENTION is admirable, and yet, when it comes to *reading* this work, one can't get round the inevitable flat dehydrated tone of the college lecture, the automatic language ("the rose-colored spectacles" of idealists, Chaucer letting "a fresh wind into the medieval garden of poetry", the works that are "interesting" or "rollicking" or that have "some powerful and gripping moments"), the donnish humor for the benefit of the students squirming in their seats as they wait for the bell ("this is the first of the ten thousand extant lines of the poem—fortunately, only about one-eighth of the whole survives"; "the nightingale is the more sympathetic character to modern readers but . . . the owl would appear to have won on points").

Then there is the unavoidableness of endless undeveloped, free-floating generalizations, the kind that do not stir or prod the mind, but are forced on the scholar by his method. Mr. Daiches repeatedly warns us against generalizing too hastily or sweepingly, but unfortunately the generalizations "appropriate" to an *omnium gatherum* literary history just have to be summary—and unhelpful, or insufficient, or unsatisfactory, or all three.

It is unhelpful to be told that "The fate of the hero in English literature will emerge more clearly in subsequent pages of this history; here we pause to remark only that the *fabliau* represents the first real challenge in European literature to the notion of heroic idealism as a way of life, and that challenge can be traced in its influential course from Cervantes to Evelyn Waugh." Sean O'Faolain and others have actually traced this development; of what avail merely to assert that it "can be" traced?

It is mere racing-your-motor academese to assert, "That the seventeenth century is a watershed in the history of English thought is sufficiently proved by the fact that it saw the publication of work by Bacon, Browne, Burton and Hobbes." To say of Chaucer that "He was, in fact, fitted by both natural genius and the circumstances of his life to become the most technically accomplished, the most widely ranging, and the most universally appealing of medieval English writers" is unimpeachable, but that's just the trouble: the literary historian must always be so damnably judicious, for he's speaking to the class, not to his friends.

One could multiply examples indefinitely. Of what use is it to be told, about Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress," that "the 'Gather Ye Rosebuds' theme is here given new subtlety and suggestiveness by the handling of the wit and the ordering of the images," if the author doesn't go on to analyze that handling and that ordering? Mr. Daiches tells us that "Containing something of the larger dimensions of life within the limiting formality of art, *Hamlet,* perhaps more than any other of Shakespeare's tragedies, lends itself to a variety of interpretations. Hamlet is both the ideal Renaissance prince and the conventional malcontent, the traditional avenger and the sensitive idealist in a brutal world, and other things besides."

How often he does, and must, fall back on that "and other things besides"! Bad methods dictate bad ends. Not that Mr. Daiches is quite unaware of this; his book is studded with such confessions as "How these elements come together could only be demonstrated by careful analysis of individual poems; it must suffice here to refer to some of the poems which best illustrate the combination. . . ." One wants to cry out, then for heaven's sake, why not drop this surveying and *do* justice, *make* an analysis?

THE DICTA are usually, as I said, unexceptionable —in a profitless way—but they are sometimes dubious. Mr. Daiches plumps for the view that "in Hamlet, intelligence and sensitivity produce inability to face the world as it is." Well, this is "the conventional wisdom," and a defensible if doubtful position—one rejected by some of the ablest critical minds of our century. It is essentially Hazlitt's "we-are-all-Hamlet." But the position needs to be supported, to be *argued*—the very thing a literary historian, by definition, doesn't have the space for. Mr. Daiches says just enough interesting things about Shakespeare to make us wish he would write at length on him, *critically,* rather than give us his lecture-notes.

Of Falstaff, he says "much ink has been spilt on the rejection of Falstaff: the simple fact is that he is (and is meant to be) engaging but not admirable. . . ." This statement is not so much wrong as insufficient. For a satisfying discussion of Falstaff we may go to William Empson's long essay on *Henry IV,* one of a number of pieces in which Empson agrees and then disagrees, at length, with J. Dover Wilson's views. Here, if you like, is the New Criticism with a vengeance: a literary

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critic arguing, almost line by line, with another literary critic's writings on a third man's plays! Yet Empson is fresh, instructive, stimulating; we *learn;* Mr. Daiches' one-shot judgments, however "sound," leave us no wiser than before.

The truth is that people have never been disinterestedly, equally engaged by all periods and "great writers" of their literature, in the godlike manner of "literary history." At any given time, we prefer this era over that, Donne over Shelley, or—twenty years later—Shelley over Donne, and we prefer for certain reasons, for certain purposes of ours, often very good reasons and purposes. We select and reject because we are alive and have certain (shifting, time-conditioned) aims—while "literary history" sits on a mountain peak, simulating an attitude of Buddha-esque timelessness, passionless, unprejudiced and dead. T. S. Eliot did not write literary history, he wrote propagandistic essays on the Elizabethan playwrights and on the metaphysicals, he has been proved "wrong" about almost everything he said—and he formed the taste of a generation. Literary history has no favorites, it must ignore nothing, it must survey and appraise everyone, it weighs and hands out "impartial" ratings. The last sentences of *A Critical History* are: "The nearer he [the literary historian] comes to his own time the scrappier and more arbitrary his account is bound to be. He is wisest to lay down his pen *in medias res*. Literature goes on." If only Mr. Daiches had yielded to the temptation to write an "arbitrary" book about something!

PROBABLY *A Critical History* will find its use as a college textbook. I hope it will not be used as *the* textbook of a course, for this would be another example of the deplorable contemporary American tendency to stuff students with snippets of things, enabling the ones with superior memories to master the "right" descriptive phrase—often a perfectly good phrase, one that really meant something to the original phrasemaker—for a thousand works none of which they have truly read or mastered. The Big Survey Course is a wretched substitute for the painful enlightening experience of wrestling at length with a single literary work. Whatever use—probably baleful—*A Critical History* is put to in our colleges, I doubt that it will or should have much impact outside them.

In his introduction Mr. Daiches says, "Art is long and life is short, and one cannot always be wholly original in everything. I hope, however, that the pattern which a single mind imposes on this vast material will make my account more lively and suggestive than the conscientious composite works of reference by teams of experts. . . ." The hope was vain, foredoomed by the chosen medium. Mr. Daiches *has* a mind, but when he—or, I believe, anyone else—turns himself into a "literary historian," the mind necessarily becomes, not "single," but a card-sorting IBM machine. It is too bad. David Daiches is a man of intelligence, good will, enormous industry, but he has produced something we do not need. We need history, and we need literary criticism; we need—among other kinds—literary criticism that takes deep and continual account of history; but this is not the same thing as "literary history." Books like *A Critical History* are always saying at once too much and too little. I hope that Mr. Daiches, who has written a book on Virginia Woolf, will next write us a book that is about something more particular, more grippable and tastable than "English literature." We want to hear a man's living voice, not the classroom lecturer's careful drone.

Literary history, as noted, is much out of fashion today. In this case, the fashion is right.

THE STAGE

IN BRIEF

A TASTE OF HONEY: Miss Shelagh Delaney's play, written when she was nineteen, unhappily shows it: Incisive, wounding, grotesque, it is more a statement of prevailing moods than a drama with any strict impulse or necessity.

The Wall: Mr. John Hersey's moral fervor is notable again in an adaptation which, lacking the documentary density of the novel, inevitably seems aimless and dilute.

Irma La Douce: Madame Irma, Ministress Plenipotentiary to *le milieu de Montmartre,* is a point of ceaseless energy and diversion in this genial rubbish about the international—and self-propagated—image of Paris as The City Up to No Good.

H.M.S. Pinafore: the Gilbert and Sullivan fable, at once honeyed and nettling, of Victorian conservatism, here in a production buoyant, ripe, exquisitely launched into the inane blue.

Becket: only rarely does M. Anouilh's study in passionate friendship impinge on Mr. T. S. Eliot's preserve; elsewhere, it is absorbing, laborious, ultimately luminous, and though deficient in any authentic historical style, justified and inhabited by another of Sir Laurence Olivier's patrician, elegiac performances.

The Hostage: Mr. Brendan Behan, fancy free and at his heart's ease, provides the most *genuinely* disreputable entertainment in town: an explosion of personality, guts, bawdry, defiance, uniquely to be cherished for its supremely irresponsible responsibility.

RICHARD HAYES

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THE SCREEN

THE TWENTY-FOURTH MILLION

IT'S NOT every month, thank goodness, in which our screens are blasted by two movies costing twelve million dollars each. Besides their excessive length (both run more than three hours) the two films have much in common: they are spectacles done on an epic scale with casts of thousands (mostly male) and elaborately staged battle scenes; and both are concerned with rebels with a cause who lost their big battle but have become symbols of victory in the fight for freedom. The main difference, however, between "Spartacus" and "The Alamo" is in their aim at a chosen audience. Employing a sophistication in script and visuals unusual for spectacles, "Spartacus" seems to be out to capture adults, while "The Alamo," less anxious to take a risk with its investment, tells a more conventional story of bravery and heroics, and hopes to win audiences of all ages but it will especially appeal to the young. Time will tell which film is first to get back its twelve million.

Kirk Douglas, who plays the title role and whose Bryna company produced "Spartacus," chose Stanley Kubrick as director after Douglas and Kubrick's predecessor came to disagreement. Although limited in experience to several well-made low-budget films and the extremely thoughtful "Paths of Glory," Kubrick has on the whole handled this difficult assignment well. He has succeeded in directing "Spartacus" as a spectacular epic that makes its audiences think. They may not agree with his glorification of the Thracian slave who led his fellow gladiators in revolt in 73 B.C., and they may be repelled by his scenes of violence and brutality or the frank episodes that reveal the low standards of the times, particularly the decadence of the Romans, but the viewers of "Spartacus" are not merely entertained by a sugar-coated, blockbuster type of spectacle. They are made aware that life was difficult and complicated in the first century before Christ, for the Roman politicians, who are displayed in action in some excellent scenes in the Forum, and especially so for the slaves, whose treatment is shown in a series of sequences reflecting the cruelty and immorality of their masters. Obviously "Spartacus" is not for the sensitive or youthful; but the film has caught the spirit of the times better than most spectacles.

Handsomely filmed in Technicolor and projected on a wide screen, "Spartacus" is unquestionably a spectacle, with elaborate scenes of the gladiators' training school, Roman villas, the runaway slaves' camps and their long treks on the hopeful road to freedom, and, most of all, the magnificent battle scene (photographed in Spain) in which General Crassus and his Roman legions defeat Spartacus and his army of ex-slaves. But for all its big scenes, the film does not neglect the smaller episodes that stress characterization, and it is in these that director Kubrick is at his best. Dalton Trumbo has written a literate script from Howard Fast's novel; and, although this script, as well as Kirk Douglas' portrayal of the role, almost venerates Spartacus as a pre-Christian saint, it does not go as far as Fast's book did in its reverence for the slaves and its disapproval of the Romans. The film is by no means delicate in contrasting the nobility of the gladiator slaves with the decadence and duplicity of the Romans, but it is particularly successful in portraying the latter as not all-black villains.

Outstanding in the large cast is Laurence Olivier, whose subtle portrait of the wealthy Roman Crassus covers a wide range, from the tough general, the wily politician, the determined aristocrat, the unsuccessful lover of the poet-slave Antoninus (Tony Curtis) and Spartacus's wife (Jean Simmons), and finally the frustrated victor who defeated Spartacus in battle but could not kill the Spartacus legend. Sharing honors with Olivier in meaty roles are Charles Laughton as Gracchus, the plebeian enemy of Crassus in the senate, and Peter Ustinov as Batiatus, the slaveholder whose gladiator school at Capua sets the stage for the start of the revolt.

Mainly because of their great emphasis on nobility, the slave roles played by Kirk Douglas, Tony Curtis, John Ireland, Jean Simmons and others lack the variety and depth of the more flamboyant Roman characterizations. But whenever his film slips into a sameness, and it does every now and then in scenes of violent action or in sentimental sequences, director Kubrick knows how to change the mood. He uses his camera well. It is unfortunate that he didn't shorten some of his scenes, but "Spartacus" accomplishes what it set out to do: sing an epical hymn of praise to the slaves who proved themselves men in their struggle for liberty.

THE MEN who defended the mission-fortress known as the Alamo also turned defeat into victory. For thirteen days, these 185 men held out against General Santa Anna and his seven thousand well-trained troops; and, although all in the Alamo were slaughtered, their delaying action gave General Sam Houston time to assemble the army that later defeated Santa Anna and won independence for Texas. Producer-director-star John Wayne celebrates this heroic stand in "The Alamo."

As a film, "The Alamo" is uneven. It has plenty of heroics on the grand scale and it is unstinting in its praise of the brave men who fought to the death, but it doesn't have enough story for its immoderate running time. James Edward Grant padded his screenplay considerably, and after a while the padding shows.

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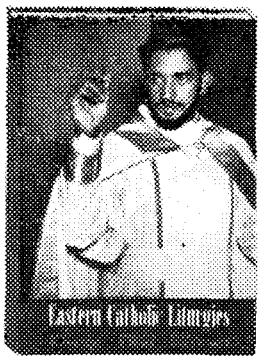

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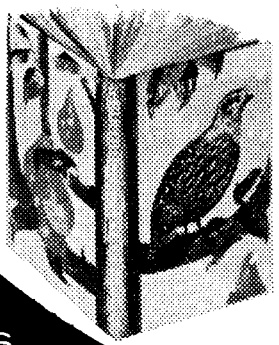

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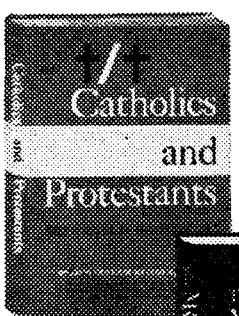

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After a series of hand-to-hand battles and fisticuffs and minor scuffles, the big slaughter when it comes is so long and drawn out that it loses effect instead of gaining the intended dramatic punch. Actor Wayne gives his usual stalwart performance as Davy Crockett, but producer-director Wayne would have been wiser if he had cut his film more stringently, especially those episodes involving him and a Mexican beauty played by Linda Cristal. And he should have cut out the scene in which he addresses God ("We haven't had many conversations, Sir") entirely.

When "The Alamo" sticks to its main business, though, the defense of the fortress and the human equations involved, it is fascinating. Richard Widmark, as the hard-drinking but valiant James Bowie, and Laurence Harvey, as the martinet, rabble-hating commander of the fort, Col. William Barret Travis, give magnificent performances that remain consistent through their continued rowing over leadership, through their softer scenes and right up to the bloody finale. Effective in smaller roles are Richard Boone as the hard-pressed Houston, Ken Curtis and Patrick Wayne as captains under Travis, and several others as devoted followers of Crockett and Bowie. Youthful audiences may be particularly thrilled by the presence of Frankie Avalon who conducts himself well as a young scout.

Although the faults in John Wayne's picture are mainly in its excesses, it deserves respect for its assets: its authentic reproduction of the Alamo as it stood in 1836 and its lively recreation of the inspiring Alamo legend.

PHILIP T. HARTUNG.

COMMUNICATIONS

"APARTHEID AND THE CHURCH"

Durban, So. Africa

TO THE EDITORS: Sean Boud is doing a good service to the truth in writing on apartheid in South Africa. I read with interest and sympathy his article in your issue of June 3. Precisely because it is a service to the truth, I am sure he will not mind another correspondent following in the footsteps of Andrew Murray [Aug. 19] and gently chiding him for an unchecked statement. It reads: "Some years ago attention was given to the unfortunate case of an African who was refused Communion in Durban Cathedral because of his race." I have been associated with Durban Cathedral in one capacity or another for twenty years, and I have never heard of this episode. When I joined the staff of Durban Cathedral as a curate in 1940, I was happy to find that inside its walls there was never the slightest hint of apartheid. Today it has an African priest on its staff who is proving quite a popular confessor to members of all races.

Another passage that requires qualification is this: "One development that would seemingly help the Church immensely is the redistribution of priests and religious working among the different races. At present the whites have one priest per five hundred Catholics and the Africans have but one per fifteen hundred. The money spent on schools, hospitals, etc. on the two races is in the same proportion: the whites have three times as much spent on them as the Africans. Almost all of the two hundred and fifty teaching brothers in the Union cater to whites; only three hundred of the twenty four hundred teaching nuns work in African schools."

Redistribution is not an easy matter. It involves a multitude of factors: historical development, dioceses, religious orders and congregations, established parishes and institutions, finance, language, age, adaptation. The South African Church has always had two problems on its hands: how to keep track of its White Catholics spread over a vast territory and how to establish itself among the non-Whites. It has probably failed to maintain the balance, but the balance cannot be redressed by a simple process of redistribution. Only African vocations will solve that problem. We must plead guilty, like most mission territories in the world, to the charge of failing to develop local vocations as they should have been developed, but the drive is on now and the response is magnificent.

It may be true that "the Whites have three times as much spent on them as the Africans" *but it is their money*. Schools and other institutions for Whites are financed out of fees paid by the Whites. Missionary endeavors among Africans were up till quite recently financed largely in the usual missionary style—by funds obtained from other sources, one of those sources being taxation of White parishes. Non-African sources still supply most of the money, but since the withdrawal of government subsidies, Africans contribute generously to their mission schools.

These criticisms of Mr. Boud's article indicate how difficult it is to write of South Africa's very complex situation. The shortcomings of the Church in South Africa are a reflection of shortcomings characteristic of the Church all over the world in recent decades, the principal one being that intense preoccupation with self-defense which cramped the manifestation of the love of Christ in our community life. The chief concern of the Church in South Africa in the years immediately ahead must be the triumph of charity in the personal lives of all Catholics over a colour bar too long accepted as an unquestioned and essential element of the social order.

We are grateful to Sean Boud, despite his few inaccuracies, for helping to emphasize that lesson.

✠ DENIS E. HURLEY, O.M.I.,
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Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

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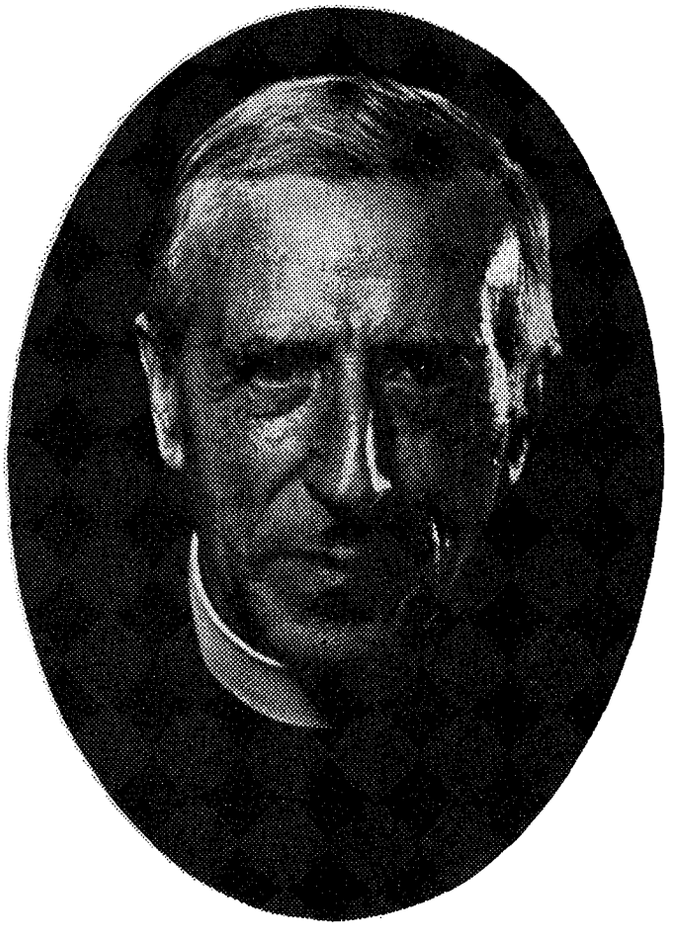

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A Distinguished Image of Precarious Life

RABBIT, RUN. By John Updike. Knopf. $4.

By RICHARD GILMAN

I REMEMBER how surprised I was when I discovered, after having written a highly enthusiastic review of John Updike's first novel *The Poorhouse Fair,* that a number of other commentators had found the book a failure, deficient in some central qualities that are supposed to be the hallmarks of important fiction. Weight, ideas, resolution! Oh, a good style, a poet if you like, but no heft, no thought and not the ghost of a wrap-up, a firmly tied knot that we can't break, which is what we pay novelists to give us.

The Poorhouse Fair was a novel of great imaginative accuracy, a delicate ranging of the immediately felt and experienced against abstraction, ideology and mechanical orderings of existence, and inconclusiveness was precisely what it depended on for the truth of its vision. Humility of this kind is apparently so rare in fiction these days that certain critics, the kind who keep their eyes peeled and blessings ready for doctors, saviors or corroborators, were baffled and disgruntled by Updike's refusal to do more than keep a fertile space open.

I think the times are against them. We are in a necessary period of non-solution in the novel, of anti-literature, which is essentially a resistance to tying neat knots, offering explanations, coming up with big solid counterweights to the miseries of life, providing alternative existences such as have come more and more to be demanded of fiction, that is to say, heroes to whom the reader can latch on and be carried right out of his mean, stifling *non-literary* days and years. Updike, like the new French *alittérateurs,* doesn't want the novel to perpetuate itself as a compensation, a branch of philosophy or a rival of science, a *way out.*

Not that he is particularly conscious of all this. *Rabbit, Run* gives off little of the air of implementing a plan which mars some of the work of Alain Robbe-Grillet or Nathalie Sarraute, for example. But it is all there, or at least nothing else is there, no tying together of loose threads, no conclusion you can put on a shelf, no road-maps, no reinforcement of attitudes or beliefs. Only a distinguished balancing-act over a void, a major image of precarious life being true to itself. And that is certainly going to make those critics mutter all over again.

The protagonist of the novel is Harry Angstrom, known as Rabbit from his days as a fleet loose-jointed high-school basketball star. He is twenty-six, has a job demonstrating something called the MagiPeel kitchen peeler in the department stores of his birthplace, a small city in Pennsylvania, is married to a high-school girl friend who is "dumb . . . she's really stupid," and has a two and a half-year-old son.

One day he returns home after work, having stopped to participate in a pickup basketball game with twelve-year-olds, during which he felt a return of the old power, the one-time skill in his hands. His wife, pregnant with their second child, is sitting before the television set watching a children's program and drinking Old-fashioneds. He notices that two short wrinkles have appeared at the corners of her mouth, giving it a greedy look, and that her hair is beginning to thin. They quarrel, caress one another, recoil, in a sterile blind dance as of unwilling cell-mates.

And then something snaps. Rabbit goes to pick up their son at his mother's, but keeps driving instead, out of the city and far into the night, until at a certain point, because the vast country is so uniform, because the map has "so many red lines and blue lines, long names, little towns, squares, circles and stars," he turns around and heads back to Brewer, not home.

He has thought of his old basketball coach, a man who made him feel "a natural," and goes to him for sanctuary. Through the coach he meets a woman, a semi-prostitute on whom his ache for love descends. He lives with her, gets a job as gardener to an old woman, loving the work of putting seeds in the ground . . . "the simplicity. Getting rid of something by giving it. God Himself folded into the tiny adamant structure." He is in a clearing; the air is breathable.

But then a struggle begins for his soul. A Protestant minister named Eccles, a man his own age, arid, no true believer but tense with an itch to effect sociological cures, takes charge of the "case," attempting to bring the couple together. Through him Rabbit feels the tide coming in again: guilt, remorse, the pressure of a vague religion, morality, the known.

When his wife enters labor he rejoins her, abandoning his mistress, who unknown to him has also become pregnant. For a time he makes a go of it, his parents and in-laws circling like motorcycle cops ready to blow the whistle. But the walls close in again and one night he leaves the house after his wife has rejected his body (throughout the novel, sexuality functions as both area of true life and image of the agonies of human separation), and seeks his mistress.

Before he can find her, Eccles reaches him with the news that his wife, having worked herself into a drunken state, has accidentally allowed their infant daughter to drown in the bathtub. Once more Rabbit comes back, and for a moment their common tragedy unites him to his wife. But at the cemetery he bolts again, since nothing has really changed, the trap is waiting, baited this time with pity, his wife is not his true life, he cannot be held by abstract appeals, Eccles' religion or his parents' sad eyes, he cannot give up his hunger for authenticity.

He goes to his mistress and is confronted with her pregnancy and an ultimatum: either she or me, work it out. "He doesn't know, what to do, where to go, what will

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happen, the thought that he doesn't know seems to make him infinitely small and impossible to capture. . . . It's like when they heard you were great and put two men on you and no matter which way you turned you bumped into one of them and the only thing to do was pass. So you passed and the ball belonged to the others and your hands were empty and the men on you looked foolish because in effect there was nobody there."

On one level *Rabbit, Run* is a grotesque allegory of American life, with its myth of happiness and success, its dangerous innocence and crippling antagonism between value and fact. But much more significantly it is a minor epic of the spirit thirsting for room to discover and *be* itself, ducking, dodging, staying out of reach of everything that will pin it down and impale it on fixed, immutable laws that are not of its own making and do not consider its integrity.

This constitutes, if you will, a rebellion against the nature of existence, but it is a rebellion we are all involved in, with greater or lesser consciousness. "Harry has no taste for the dark, tangled, visceral aspect of Christianity, the *going through* quality of it, the passage into death and suffering that redeems and inverts these things, like an umbrella blowing inside out. He lacks the mindful will to walk the straight line of a paradox. His eyes turn toward the light however it glances into his retina."

Which is to say that Harry is not an admirable character; fiction that has repudiated a teaching or confirming role has no "admirable" characters. But moralists needn't fear that Updike is preaching that we should all leave our wives and responsibilities. He is simply presenting us with a vision of what persists beneath the adjustments we have made to necessity: the dream of freedom, in which truth finally has no other test than its coherence with our deepest desires, and nothing is so that we have not made so. That seems to me to be a theme with which literature, in all its authentic occasions, has in one way or another concerned itself.

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Bizarre Vision of the Commonplace

THE BALLARD OF PECKHAM RYE. By Muriel Spark. J. B. Lippincott. $3.75.

By WILLIAM JAMES SMITH

MISS SPARK is a novelist of startling and sinister talent who became known in this country a year or so ago with the publication of a *tour de force* entitled *Memento Mori. Memento Mori* was the third of Miss Spark's novels to be published in her native Britain but her earlier work had not attracted wide attention here, though in many ways her first novel, *The Comforters,* was a more "accessible" work —and a far pleasanter one. Even earlier, however, she had established a literary reputation with her studies of Mary Shelley, Emily Brontë, Masefield and other writers.

Miss Spark was identified from the start as a "Catholic" novelist and as a great new "comic" talent. The latter certainly is dubious. She belongs rather in the tradition of the eccentric novel—going all the way back to Peacock and Firbank and up to Iris Murdoch and Flannery O'Connor. It is hard to imagine anyone laughing at Miss Spark, as one might, say, at Waugh, though here I may be diverging from up-to-date tastes since I find the Angry Young Men unendurably depressing when they are said to be at their funniest. If Miss Spark is comic it is in the wildly unfunny, nightmarish manner of Kafka and his Mack Sennett cops. She sees the world with a unique eye and a wonderfully quick apprehension of the grotesque. She sees too much of the grotesque, indeed, for her ever to become a very popular writer or a loved one. The best one can offer her is admiration, but it is very hard to refuse that tribute in measure, and perhaps a measure, too, of delight at such a bizarre vision of the commonplace.

Again it is admiration rather than any livelier affection we must offer Miss Spark for that rare talent—freedom from cliché. The cliché is a handy and comfortable device and its complete abnegation works a hardship on the reader as well as on the writer. But that is precisely Miss Spark's intent. In *The Ballad* she condescends to a Demon Lover, but that is as far as she will go. Her Demon Lover is a unique one, Dougal Douglas, a canny Scot from the University of Edinburgh (as is Miss Spark herself) and it is perhaps an indication of Miss Spark's grudging affection for him as an alter ego that he has a very lively appreciation of the cliché. Among Dougal's other occupations (he is primarily a "human engineer") he occupies himself as a ghost writer. Here are some of his notes for the autobiography of a theatrical lady that he is ghosting:

"I was too young at the time to understand why my mother was crying

"As he entered the room a shudder went through my frame

"In that moment of silent communion we renewed our shattered faith

"She was to play a vital role in my life

"Memory had not played me false

"He was always an incurable romantic

"I became the proud owner of a bicycle."

One gets the distinct feeling that Miss Spark wishes indeed that she could do the "We were living a lie" bit, but she knows it is not for her.

Miss Spark plays an ambiguous role generally with her Demon Lovers and other minor devils who go through the world seeking the ruin of souls. They are highly incompetent, first of all, and often, they admit with a sigh, do more good than harm. Dougal Douglas comes to his South London factory job as a human engineer with every intention of doing evil, or at least of being naughty. He does not particularly disguise his intent, aside from having his horns removed by a plastic surgeon, but then proudly displaying the bumps. And a certain measure of havoc he does manage. Dixie's beau walks out

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on her at the altar, absenteeism goes up and there are squabbles in bars, but Douglas finally is run out of town and Dixie gets her boy friend back and things settle down once more.

Dougal's chief trouble, it would seem, is that he is too morally censorious for his task. In Peckham Rye he is too busy observing the morality to do much corrupting.

"There are four types of morality observable in Peckham," says Dougal. "Take the first category, Emotional. Here, for example, it is considered immoral for a man to live with a wife who no longer appeals to him. Take the second, Functional, in which the principal factor is class solidarity such as, in some period and places, has also existed amongst the aristocracy, and of which the main manifestation these days is the trade union movement. Three, Puritanical, of which there are several modern variants, monetary advancement being the most prevalent gauge of the moral life in this category. Four, Traditional, which accounts for about one per cent of the Peckham population, and which in its simplest form is Christian. All moral categories are of course intermingled. Sometimes all are to be found in the beliefs and behaviour of one individual."

"Where does this get us?" asks Dougal's employer.

"I can't say," Dougal said. "It is only a preliminary analysis."

Dougal offers, however, to embody his findings in a report with appropriate case histories. And, one suspects, Miss Spark snitched them to write her novel. She doesn't get much further than Dougal, and if she hasn't been run out of town like Dougal she's been lucky.

Perilous Theme Perilously Treated

BE NOT ANGRY. By William Michelfelder. Atheneum. $4.

By ANNE CLARKE

THE THEME of William Michelfelder's second novel—the love affair between a priest and a young Catholic woman—is a perilous one. Regardless of the approach, the pitfalls are bound to be numerous. Michelfelder manages to avoid the obvious extremes of cheap sensationalism on the one hand and maudlin piety on the other. But his own attitude, which is one of intense (and, one feels, sincere) compassion, proves in this case to be a snare that not only carries his main characters into an abyss of sentiment but suffocates the reader in waves of emotional rhetoric as well.

Thomas Bowles is young, gifted and mistaken in his vocation. Apparently swept into the priesthood on a surge of adolescent idealism and fervor he executes his duties in such a fashion that he inspires his parishioners (and the pastor) but only irritates most of his fellow priests. To these priests Bowles is only an enigma: "When he strikes a match," one of them complains, "he *thinks*." But Bowles is nothing so much as lost: an impossible romantic who claims that "I am a priest because I believe nothing is of great moment," he feels he has no identity and that, as a result, his life has no meaning. That is, until he sees himself in Catherine Knott.

A researcher for a news magazine, she views her task as "bringing eternal truths to bear on the field of communications," and spends her spare time writing letters to the editor and running from one militant meeting to another. But she acts out of the hopeless notion that things depend on her and, like Bowles, she's desperate for some kind of definition to her life.

Bowles is confirmed in his decision to leave the priesthood by the dying pastor who is reminded of his own early priesthood and who tells Bowles, "there is nothing worse than self-deception in religion". Insisting on the "mystery of divine mercy," Monsignor Murchie asks, "Who is to say that the loss of the priestly vocation is the same as the loss of belief"?

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It's not very strange that the people who emerge most validly from this emotionally overwrought book are those who most nearly escape the author's attention: the curates and housekeeper (who might remind one of J. F. Powers' scenes of rectory life); Catherine's co-worker who drugs herself against hopelessness by sexual promiscuity; her agnostic boss who could afford to spare her some comfort.

It's impossible not to be touched by Michelfelder's intense concern for the desperation and loneliness of his characters. (And incidentally, it is ridiculous to maintain, as one reviewer has, that the book is somehow an attack on the American aspects of Catholicism. It's quite clear that William Michelfelder is not acting as a polemicist.) What makes the book essentially unacceptable (apart from Monsignor Murchie's heterodox "wisdom") is the fact that Bowles and Catherine Knott are such neurotic vehicles for the simplistic notion that love conquers all.

Human Love and Human Failure

STRANGERS. By Albert Memmi. Orion Press. $3.50.

By ALICE ELLEN MAYHEW

"TRUST ME," says one stranger to the other, "I'll keep you safe from any sorrow." But in M. Memmi's universe, in the tradition of Céline, or even of Jean-Paul Sartre, even the gestures and words of love turn tainted and despairing, mocking us with their absurdity. As with Camus' ironic heroes, each person's own isolation walls the *other* in, until love is all gone and there is nothing left but a mechanical guilt. In this book, a young couple, trying to preserve their love against tremendous difficulties and adjustments, fight against the inexorable failure of all love, a struggle which brings them both to the brink of madness. "I was," says the man, in the end, "turning into a monster."

M. Memmi's narrative seems, at least at first, a little self-important for a tale of the woes of mixed marriage, the blending of two civilizations, East meets West (in this case, Latin meets Nordic) and all that. By the end, however, he has pushed us relentlessly into the agony of human love which turns to hate. The pain is palpable. One can feel the despair.

The story is told by a young Tunisian Jew from the tattered fringe of the Tunis ghetto, who brings his French-Alsatian, Catholic bride home to live. There, with only intermittent respites of comparative peace, they commence to devour one another. The man struggles among the demands of his orthodox family, his loyalties to his own people and his new country, his love for his wife, and his French education and new, "liberated" attitudes.

He is torn between admitting that his previous life in Tunis had been semi-barbaric and admitting that he is himself unsure if he can again accept this old world where one must belong to his clan. As his wife's distaste becomes more ardent and obvious, he is racked by doubts. If he agrees with her, he is disloyal to his family; if he opposes her, he is disloyal to himself. He tortures them both: "I dragged her off on long expeditions down sordid lanes where the gutters ran with muddy water. I did not spare her. . ."

Little by little, they drive themselves out of contact with the world; they are, in a sense, together, incompatible with any possible society. It prefigures their psychological isolation. Their own love is never possible: each retires to his own hell of solitude and despair. Even when they abuse each other, it is a futile pretext. Suffering is the only humanity left them—all their other feelings are impure. Once in a while, one protests his love, and then goes sinking down again before its hopelessness. A child is born but he only emphasizes their impossible dilemma. Occasionally, there is a spurt of anger but this is lost in frustration and hysteria.

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In the end, the wife can cry to her husband, "Ah, but you hate me. . . And where can I go? Is there anyone I can trust? Sometimes I wish I could believe in God again, and pray." And for him, she has become "the symbol and source of my destruction. And I was nothing now but a phantom, my own enemy and hers. I had been her betrayer, she my destroyer."

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The End of Reading

A VOICE FROM THE ATTIC. By Robertson Davies. Knopf. $4.75.

By MAX COSMAN

A SURVEY of *A Voice from the Attic* might well begin with the title. Its latter part, we are shown, comes from a Canadian poem which refers to the country as "America's attic." The appelation, one cannot help feeling, must at first have had a rueful charm for Mr. Davies. As for "a voice," it obviously has its origin in something more directly connected with himself. Editor and teacher, he also happens to be a rather popular voice in the book columns of a number of newspapers in Canada.

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House of Intellect, its distinctions between drama and theatre, classicism and romanticism, and the like, *A Voice from the Attic* is no higgledy-piggledy résumé of its author's particular reading. On the contrary: it is a marshaling of views, some original others not, on the content and purpose of reading in general.

Mr. Davies' discussion revolves about the proposition that the *clerisy*—his term for those readers who have curiosity, good taste, a free mind, a belief in the human race, and a genuine love of literature—must become more conscious of themselves; that is, accept more responsibility than they have in recent times. In an immediate sense, they must become a leaven to the lump of readers as a whole; in a sense more mediate, they must act as individual welcomers of that new order of civilization which, when it comes, will put aside "the lumpishness, the dowdy triviality, the shoddy *expertise,* and the lack of foundation" bedeviling life today.

Summarized so, Mr. Davies' appeal perhaps sounds like something out of a contemporary crackpot Messianism. It is anything but that. In context it is a stream of considerations flowing between banks of belief and good sense. There are obiter dicta like "our age has robbed millions of the simplicity of ignorance, and has so far failed to lift them to the simplicity of wisdom," which is a sharp riposte to those dispensers of uplift or soulmanship that are always on the literary scene.

There are also frequent bits of information which give fresh meaning to commonplace concepts. Take the Victorianism that servants usually attracted *followers* among soldiers away from their barracks. But this is hardly surprising, Mr. Davies points out, "for in those days these men were not supplied by the army with food between midday and breakfast the following morning; household servants possessed the one unfailing charm—food."

There are more plangent notations too. Speaking of the now forgotten writer-reformer Henry Cockton, who flourished about 1840, Mr. Davies indicates how someone

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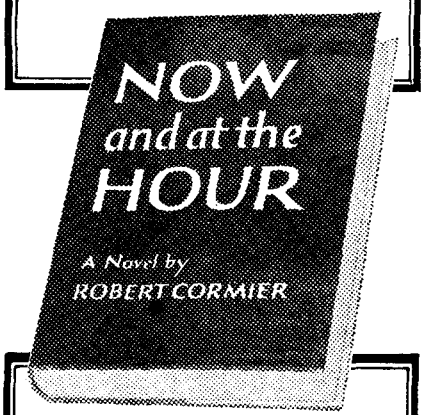

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Anne Clark is a reader for a book reviewing service. This is her first appearance in The Commonweal.

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